

Remarks at the Opening Session of the United States-Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit Meeting in Rancho Mirage, California
February 15, 2016

Well, good afternoon, everyone. It is my privilege to welcome you to this landmark gathering, the first U.S.-ASEAN summit hosted by the United States. This reflects my personal commitment, and the national commitment of the United States, to a strong and enduring partnership with your 10 nations individually and to Southeast Asia as one region, as one community, ASEAN.

I want to thank my cochair, President Choummali of Laos, Secretary-General Minh, and leaders from all 10 ASEAN nations for being here.

As everyone knows, I first came to know the people and the beauty and the strength of Southeast Asia as a boy when I lived in Indonesia for several years with my mother. As President, I've had the opportunity to visit most of your countries. You and the people of ASEAN have always shown me extraordinary hospitality, and I hope we can reciprocate with the warmth today and tomorrow, which is why I did not hold this summit in Washington. It is cold there. It's snowing. So welcome to beautiful, warm Sunnylands. [*Laughter*]

As President, I've insisted that even as the United States confronts urgent threats around the world, our foreign policy also has to seize on new opportunities. And few regions present more opportunity to the 21st century than the Asia-Pacific. That's why, early in my Presidency, I decided that the United States, as a Pacific nation, would rebalance our foreign policy and play a larger and long-term role in the Asia-Pacific. And this has included engagement with Southeast Asia and ASEAN, which is central to the region's peace and prosperity and to our shared goal of building a regional order where all nations play by the same rules.

As part of our deeper engagement, I'm proud to be the first U.S. President to meet with leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries. This summit marks our seventh meeting. At your invitation, the United States joined the East Asia Summit, and together, we've made it the region's leading forum for addressing political and security challenges. I've made now seven visits to the ASEAN region, more than any previous American President. At our last meeting in Kuala Lumpur, we forged a new strategic partnership. And our sustained engagement is delivering concrete results that benefit all of us, momentum that we can build on here at this summit.

Together, we can continue to increase the trade and economic partnerships that create jobs and opportunity for our people. Since I took office, we've boosted trade between the United States and ASEAN by 55 percent. The region is now our fourth largest goods trading partner, including U.S. exports that support more than 500,000 American jobs. U.S. companies have been the largest source of foreign investment in ASEAN, one of the many reasons that the region's GDP has surged in recent years, lifting people from poverty into the middle class.

I want to take this opportunity to again congratulate my fellow leaders on the formation of the ASEAN Community, which is another important step toward integrating your economies. Here at this summit, we can build on this progress and do more to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation so that growth and development is sustainable and inclusive and benefits all people.

Together, we can also continue to increase our security cooperation to meet shared challenges. In recent years, the United States has increased our maritime security assistance to our allies and partners in the region, improving our mutual capabilities to protect lawful commerce

and to respond to humanitarian crisis. Here at this summit, we can advance our shared vision of a regional order where international rules and norms, including freedom of navigation, are upheld and where disputes are resolved through peaceful, legal means.

Together, we can continue to support the aspirations and dignity of our citizens. The historic election in Myanmar and the transition now underway gives hope for a nation that is inclusive, united, peaceful, and democratic. In joining the TPP, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei have committed to high labor and environmental standards.

I'm very proud that our Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative is helping to empower young men and women who are shaping the region every day. As you know, I've held a number of town hall meetings with these remarkable young people. And their idealism, their courage, their willingness to work for the future that they believe in should all give us hope. As leaders, we have to answer their aspirations. And here at the summit, we can reaffirm that strong, prosperous and inclusive societies require good governance, rule of law, accountable institutions, vibrant civil societies, and upholding human rights.

Finally, together, we can continue to do more around the world to meet transnational challenges that no one nation can meet alone. As we were reminded again by the attack in Jakarta last month, the scourge of terrorism demands that we stay vigilant, share more information, and work cooperatively to protect our people. Just as our nations worked together to achieve a strong climate change agreement in Paris, now we need to implement that agreement and step up investment in clean, affordable energy, including for developing countries.

So economic growth that is inclusive, creating opportunities for all; mutual security and the peaceful resolution of disputes; human dignity, including respect for human rights and development that is sustainable—that is our vision. And that's what brings us here together today.

I want to thank all of my fellow leaders for being here and for your commitment to a strong U.S.-ASEAN partnership. And given the extraordinary progress that we've achieved together these past 7 years, I'm confident that we can continue our momentum at this summit.

With that, I want to invite President Choummali to say a few words as well. Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:47 p.m. in the Great Hall of the Sunnylands Center at the Annenberg Retreat at Sunnylands Estate.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Association of Southeast Asian Nations-U.S. summit in Rancho Mirage, CA, opening session.

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Names: Choummali Saignason; Minh, Le Luong.

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